

House of Representatives
Education and Cultural Resources Committee
Hon. Jim Peterson
63rd Montana State Legislature
Capitol Building
Helena, Montana

January 21, 2013

RE: Senate Bill No. 42 "Increase K-12 BASE Aid"

Chairman Peterson and Committee Members:

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes ("CSKT" or "Tribes") support the passage of Senate Bill 42, a bill that furthers Montana's constitutional mandate under Article X to establish equality of educational opportunity. This bill does not create any new entitlements; rather, it modestly increases existing entitlements for Native American students that were established in the 2005 Special Session. Because Montana has not yet closed the achievement gap that exists between Native American students and their non-Native counterparts, the Tribes support passage of this bill.

There is no question that Montana's public schools exhibit a significant achievement gap between Native American students and their non-Native counterparts. Virtually all methods of measure reveal this problem, including standardized test scores, dropout rates, and graduation rates.¹ For example, in 2010, 85.1% of white students graduated high school, as opposed to a

¹ Daphne Herling, Montana Kids Count, Issue brief, Summer 2012, Vol. 1, No. 2; Presentation by Mandy Smoker Broadus, April 19, 2011, "Indian Education in Montana – Closing the Achievement Gap & Implementing Indian Education for All", available at <http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/ISA/11AprMSUBozeman.pdf>.

62.4% of Native American students.² In fact, since at least as far back as 2006, the Native dropout rate has been two, and sometimes three, times as high as the white student dropout rate.³

To be sure, the solution to the problem of the achievement gap is as complex as its cause. However, adequate funding is an essential part of that solution, which is why the Tribes urge this Committee to continue to support Native American educational entitlements. Accordingly, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes support SB 42 and strongly encourage this Committee to pass this bill to the Senate floor.

Sincerely,

Shane Morigeau
Lobbyist
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

² Daphne Herling, "Graduation Counts," Montana Kids Count, Issue brief, Summer 2012, Vol. 1, No. 2

³ *Id.*